Huddle
Social Event Discovery

Value Proposition

With Huddle we aim to make finding, planning, and organizing events much easier with friends, or by yourself. We want users to be able to focus on the experience and having a good time without the hassles of planning and finding new and exciting events. With Huddle, events are easier. With Huddle, you can discover and explore.

Huddle Team

The Huddle Team is shown below in Figure 1.

Mike Weingert
Developer

Nadav Lidor
Manager

Joe Polin
User Testing / Documentation

Brandon Evans
Design

Figure 1: The Huddle Team

Problem Statement

People get stuck in familiar routines. Familiarity is comforting. Because people are stuck in these routines, they may never truly learn about themselves and explore things they like. Furthermore, this problem is compounded by the pains of planning and organizing. Scheduling friends, finding common availabilities, booking reservations, these are all headaches that dissuade people from exploring and discovering.

Solution

Huddle proposes a system to help users learn more about themselves, experiment, and ultimately improve their quality of life. Users can discover new events that they are interested in: hobbies, events, foods, or destinations. Huddle will also make scheduling easy and help automate the process of planning and organizing friends. Through event discovery, and automated scheduling, Huddle will allow users to focus on experiences and discovery, without the hassles of finding and planning events. With this problem in mind, we sought out typical users to show us how they currently plan and schedule events.

Contextual Inquiry Customers

Interviewee #1 and #2: Vlad Zaharia, Software Engineer in Seattle, and Jasper Fung, Software Engineer in San Francisco.

Vlad and Jasper are full time software engineers living in different parts of the west coast. Both of them recently started full time work within the past year and are 23 years old. They were recruited through Mike's personal connections because they have both recently settled into full time routines. Both have recently moved to a new city, started a new career and are at an opportune time to explore and discover. Their backgrounds are in computer science, and both are very adept at using computers and mobile devices. They are up to date with the latest technology trends and mobile applications. They will provide an interesting perspective as they know what current technological trends exist, and possess different localized experiences for Seattle and San Francisco. The master-apprentice model here was used to learn how they plan events if they have time on the weekend, and how they coordinate with their friends.

Interviewee #3: Elijah, Private Chef at Narnia House, Stanford

Elijah has served as private chef for Narnia House for several years. He designs, plans, and cooks meals for an entire dorm of students during weekdays. He was recruited by Brandon Evans who lives at the dorm where Elijah works as a private chef. We saw him as a good interview subject due to his background as a busy, working professional with a rigid work schedule. Elijah lives with his wife in San Jose and commutes to Stanford. As someone with a relatively small circle of friends and with a very busy week he often opts to stay home rather than go out during the weekend. Recently, a new friend of his has been persuading him to try out new things, like an upcoming Halloween celebration in Santa Cruz. As a less outgoing interview subject his situation provides insights into the factors that discourage people from going out and trying new things (busy work schedule, lack of outgoing friends, etc). The master apprentice model was used here to learn how Elijah plans his weekends and free time.

Interviewee #4: Ella Kim, Product Marketing Manager at Google

Ella recently completed a 2+ year stint with Google's marketing team. She was recruited through Joe's personal connections. Although she worked at the Mountain View office, she chose to live in San Francisco in order to maximize her opportunities for exploring the city, attending events, and meeting new people. Ella found herself very busy during the week, and usually could not spare the time to make extensive weekend plans ahead of time. Thus, she often found herself scrambling to pull together a group and select an activity after work on Fridays. Ella recently began the Master's in Computer Science program at Stanford. The master apprentice model was used here to learn how Ella plans her weekends and free time.

Interviewee #5: Lara Prior-Palmer, Undergraduate, History Major, Stanford

Lara has very recently moved to California from London, her home town. She was also recruited through an intercept (running into her around campus and asking if she minded being interviewed). The interview revolved around her habits back in England. Growing up in a big city, Lara felt as if there was always something going on. Yet this variety often created apathy, and Lara got tired of the nightclub scene, the hassle of going out with public transportation, and the extensive logistical

preparations. She feels that the key for a good activity is stepping out of her comfort zone, challenging herself to leave her natural environment and explore truly new places. Spontaneity and little planning appeals to her, and she believes that a good experience often includes the small failures and discomfort in exploring the new. The master apprentice model was used here to learn how Lara used to plan her outings in London and coordinate with her friends.

Contextual Inquiry Results

Interviewee #1: Vlad Zaharia

As Vlad lives in Seattle, this interview was conducted over Skype. However, the master-apprentice relationship was performed through screen sharing. Vlad would show on his computer screen what he was doing, and could explain his rational. Vlad had an interesting perspective as he recently settled into his new home in Seattle. His rent is very expensive, and as a result, he feels that he has to make the most of his time because of the cost of rent. However, he has a relatively small friend circle. When he has free time he will consult his small group of friends and see what they are doing. For him it is more important to spend time with them compared to the actual event itself. There is a deep social context associated with his event planning as the people are more important than the event itself. He is willing to try new things, but usually it is with friends, or organized by his friends. Figure 2 shows a screenshot of Vlad using Google to find ski destinations in Washington state.
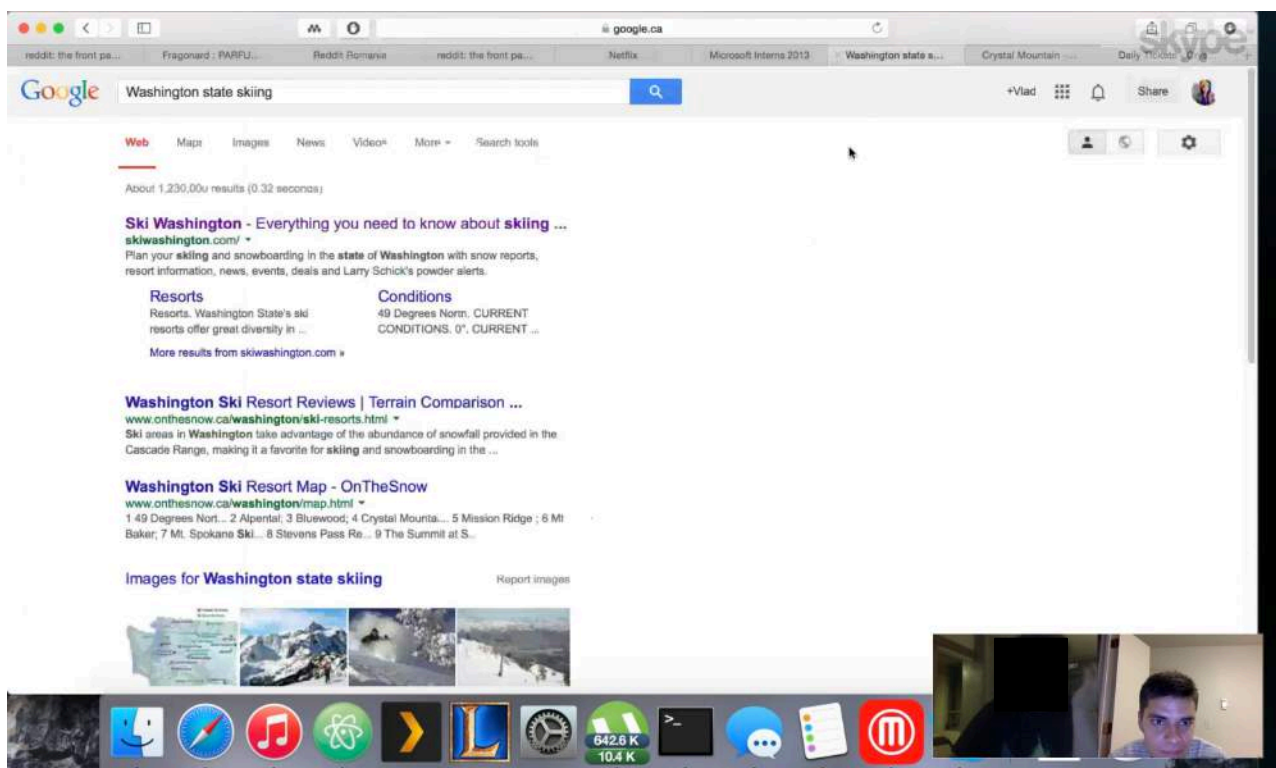

Figure 2: Vlad Discovering Skiing Events

Interviewee #2: Jasper Fung

Jasper also has a small friend circle. When he has free time he will first consult his friend circle on Facebook. He will often cycle through his events feed on Facebook to discover new events and see what his friends are doing. Jasper, as with Vlad, shares the same sentiment that because he is paying so much he should constantly be going to events. Jasper will check local San Francisco websites that have lists of events going on; new festivals that are in San Francisco, markets, special events. This list

usually dominates what he does with his time to make sure he experiences what he calls the true San Francisco city. Jasper also uses Foursquare to find local events. Figure 3 below shows Jasper using Foursquare to find local events in San Francisco.
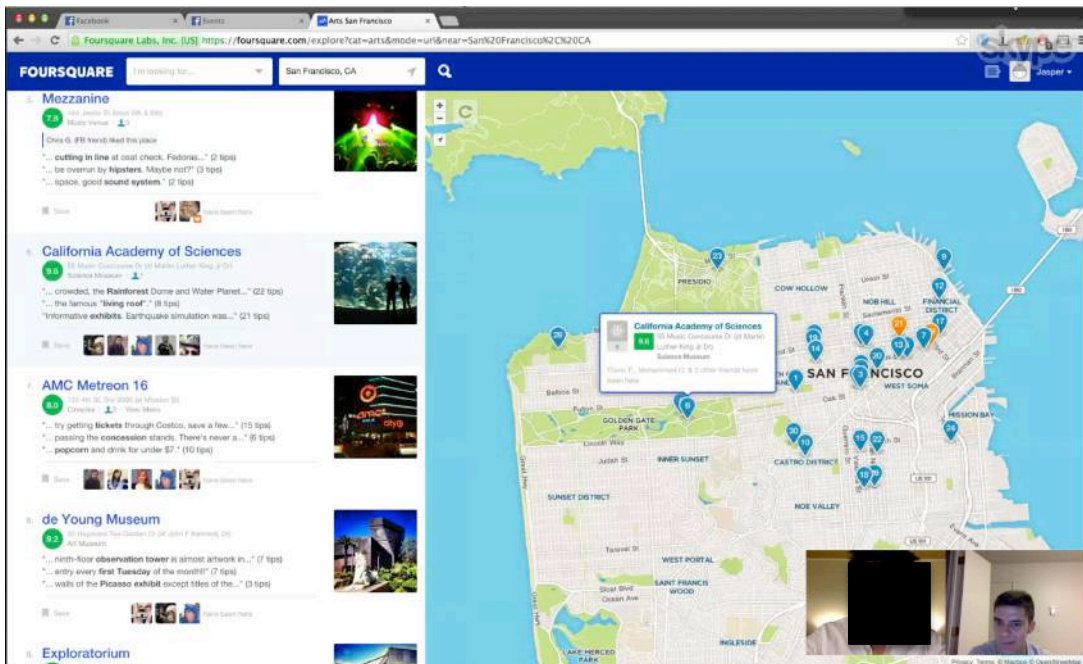

Figure 3: Jasper Discovering on Foursquare

Interviewee #3: Elijah

Elijah has a rigid and full schedule during weekdays. He is very routine-oriented. He wakes up at the same time, takes the same bus, and works until the same end time. However, during the evenings his schedule is more flexible. He mainly goes hiking in his free time and mainly uses a forum where other hker's post information including custom maps and guides for information. However, the process isn't ideal because he has to sift through unstructured content to figure out whether the hike they are talking about is what he wants. To find restaurants he uses yelp. However, he generally doesn't trust the comments as he doesn't know who the people are. He likes to talk to people in real life and if they seem trustworthy or "his type of guy. Social recommendations are very important. Aside from hiking and restaurants he does not try very many new things. However, he is going to a Halloween event in Santa Cruz soon because one of his friends recommended it to him. Figure 4 below shows Elijah at work where he was interviewed.

"It's not about numbers, it's about people".

Figure 4: Elijah at Work

Interviewee #4: Ella

Ella also has a rigid and full schedule. Often she will come home on Friday and have no plans for the evening. The first thing she will do is reach out to friends to see what they are doing. If her friends have no plans she might just call it a night. However, if she really wants to go out she will expand her friend circle and reach out to more people. She is more concerned with spending time with friends as opposed to the actual event itself. She usually uses google chat or email to communicate with people. If she really wants to plan something she will use various apps or websites to find events in the area. Figure 5 shows Ella on her computer looking at things to do in San Francisco.
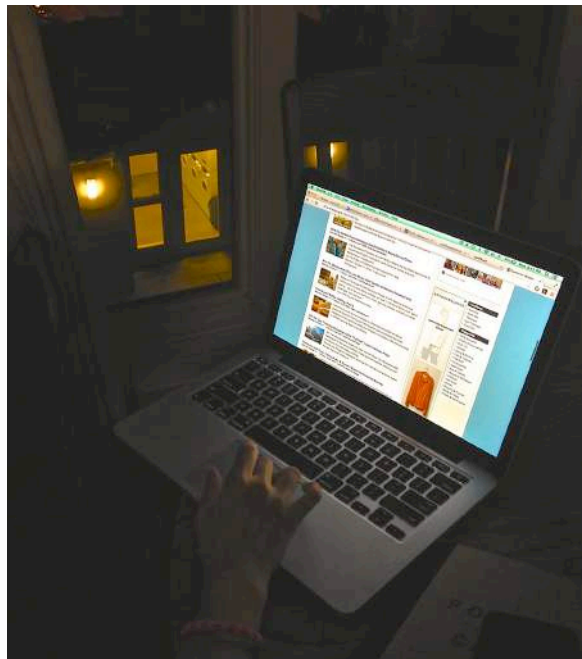

Figure 5: Ella Discovering Events in San Francisco

Laura is an undergrad who just moved to Stanford from England and grew up in London. Living in London there were lots of events going on, endless night clubs and bars. However, orchestrating an outing with friends was incredibly difficult as transportation can be a pain. The process of planning with friends is challenging, but usually done one to one. Usually she communicates with each friend individually and then coordinates them all as a whole. For her the most exciting part is getting out of her comfort zone, and when things don't go according to plan. She recounted an experience when she was flying to France but accidentally ended up in Italy so she had to bike up. She recounts this experience as being very exciting and fun. Sometimes she likes to plan things by herself so that she does not have to worry about coordinating her friends. Figure 6 below shows Laura using her phone to attempt to coordinate her friends.
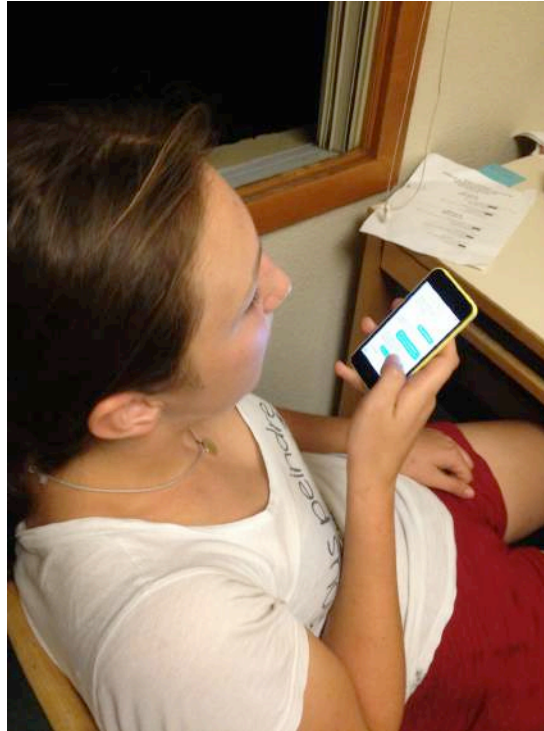

Figure 6: Laura Coordingating Her Friends on Her Phone

Overall Contextual Inquiry Results

Friends
We found that, in general, users professed that friends were the most important part of the event. Going with their friends was more important than the event itself.

Coordination is Hard
Most users professed that coordinating their friends, finding events that works for everyone is a difficult task.

Small Friend Circles
Most interviewees have a relatively small friend circle and usually like to go to events with the same people. Although they meet new people at events, the friends they plan and schedule with is usually fixed.

Bearing in mind the results of the contextual inquiry, we answered the task analysis questions below.

Task Analysis Questions

1. Who is going to use the system?

People of all backgrounds set out to discover new activities and events on a daily and weekly basis, with friends or by themselves. The search for enjoyable events is shared by student, working class, top executives to young interns. Some look to optimize their free time within a tight schedule, others have more flexibility and look to pick up new hobbies. For some, this is about breaking the routine, stepping out of their comfort zone, while others are simply looking for fun ways to spend their time. Doubtless, exploring new places, people, events and activities appeals to a very broad range of users.

2. What tasks do they now perform?

Currently, when users are making plans, attempting to spend their free time in a new, fun, exciting, un-traditional manner, they preform the following tasks:
- **Scan for local event/activities** - figuring out what is happening in their area and which events are currently available. These can be signature events, main tourist places, as well as restaurants, nightclubs, festivals, bowling alleys and recreational facilities.
- **Understand "what's hot"** – for some, particularly city dwellers and young adults, the search is more focused on the new and exciting, a recently opened bar or an exclusive party line that everyone is talking about.
- **Find out what friends are doing** – often, people are looking to find out which events their friends are going to, and join in.
- **Invite friends** – expanding the event group, making sure no one is left out.
- **Evaluate event logistics** – evaluating what are the different logistical aspects of each option – costs, transportation, distance, weather, time, comfort et cetera.
- **Decision-making** – narrowing down the different options and deciding on a particular event is one of the most significant tasks that people spend their time and energy on. This task is greatly amplified when done in a group, trying to factor in everyone's preferences, as well as logistical aspects (see above). This task can be very tedious, often involving multiple one-on-one conversations, in multiple media platforms.

3. What tasks are desired?

From our interviews, personal analysis and interpretation, these are some of the main tasks people would like to be able to do:
- Easily see the logistics behind each events (i.e. travel time, expected costs)
- Smart and personalized event suggestions, incorporating logistic limitations (no car, looking for something cheap/expensive).
- Easily figure out what time all friends are free (instead of multiple-platform, one-on-one scheduling)
- Easier method of getting group consensus over what event to do.
- Receive suggestions that push you outside your comfort zone – people report having a much better time once going out of their routine, i.e. a bike ride can be very exciting when preformed in a new area, or with new people.
- Gain confidence that the event/activity will be enjoyable/worthwhile beforehand – i.e. personal recommendations, live status etc.

4. How are the tasks learned?

People generally learn to preform the above-mentioned tasks in these ways:
- Word of mouth - friends recommend their favorite sources of information.
- Search engines and event guides – people perform searches to figure out how to find interesting events.
- Social media - helps people see what their friends are up to.
- Observation – spending time with friends, figuring out how they plan their outings and communicate with friends.
- Advertisements – on the web, magazines, billboards.

5.   Where are the tasks performed?

The tasks related to planning a group outing take place over several forms of communication (computers, mobile devices, face-to-face conversations, etc) as well as multiple different environments (at home, at work, during social events). Event discovery is typically conducted on a computer, and communication will happen across computers and phones.

6.   What's the relationship between customer & data?

Customers are currently overwhelmed by the amount of information available for choosing events ot pursue. The information related to different possible activities/venues isn't owned by any single entity. Instead the information exists in the real world and is also compiled in many forms by different guides and resources (yelp, city guides, forums, etc). Different websites and applications have different listings of events, and as a result, many of the users interviewed professed to scanning multiple sources of information before deciding.

7.   What other tools does the customer have?

Customers use a variety of online guides and resources listing recommended venues and activities as well as review aggregation sites like yelp. They also use several different communication programs as well as note taking programs that help them store their lists of places to go. Facebook is often used as a tool for communication and event planning. As well, there are a variety of mobile apps that are used for event finding and communication including foursquare, google chat, etc.

8.   How do users communicate with each other?

Users communicate through Facebook and other forms of social media, texting, email, phone calls, and face-to-face meetings.

9. How often are tasks performed?
Although customers vary in their level of social activity, these tasks seem to be performed on a weekly cycle. Often social plans are concentrated on the weekend, and the tasks required to craft social plans occur immediately before and during the weekend.

10. What are the time constraints on these tasks?
Many of the people that we interviewed cited busy work-lives as detrimental to their ability to effectively plan ahead. Customers who wish to participate in events with friends must also respect the time constraints of their friends. Finally, customers must learn about an event, be convinced to attend, and potentially organize a group of friends before the event begins (ideally a few hours before the event begins). There is often a very small time window between when a customer finished his or her work week and when the customer begins searching for something to do that evening.

11. What happens when things go wrong?

If the customer does not find or choose events that are suitable, he or she will either end up staying home or will not have a fulfilling experience at the unfavorable event. The customer is likely to retire this resource for recommended events (unless it has proven itself before). If the breakdown occurs in coordinating between friends, the entire outing might fall through, people might have trouble meeting up, or logistics might be unnecessarily complicated (i.e. everyone drives his or her own car).

From the results of our task analysis and contextual inquiry we brainstormed tasks and ideas as shown in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7: Brainstorming Results

From this, we came up with a core list of 3 tasks we wish to support.

Friend Time Scheduling (simple)

This task revolves around the act of finding a time that works for everyone given a list of availabilities. This is a matter of just taking all availabilities and finding the common time that works for all. This is a simple task that most users professed to doing by hand, but which would be a great feature to automate within our application. This task was chosen because all users currently performed it manually which is a nuisance, and it would be quite easy to automate.

Communication between Friends (moderate)

Users professed to having difficulty communicating between friends; having to resort to different mediums for different people. This task may not be explicit communication such as messages or texts, but may be as simple as voting where each vote is a form of one bit communication between users. This task was chosen as the current solution appears to be quite fragmented. Friends communicate on different platforms, and chat often gets off topic. In general all users professed to having difficulty communicating effectively. It would be nice to have our app act as a central communication avenue for discussion related to event discovery, planning, and scheduling.

Curated Event Discovery (complex)

Event discovery is a very challenging problem. Different users have different wants for what type of events they would like to see. This task centers around finding customized and curated lists of events for different users so that they are able to find events they are interested in easier. This task was chosen as every user professed to having difficulties finding events to go to. There are a variety of websites that may have an interesting event or two but these lists are not curated. Furthermore, when planning with friends it is really hard to find events that everyone would want to go to. This is one of the main selling point of the application: the ability to find events that users are interested in.

App Ideas

Challenges

The idea of challenges is to attempt to motivate people through competition and challenges. This idea centers around themes from gamification and social mechanics. We can allow users to discover themselves, try new things, by having friends challenge each other, or perhaps have the app challenge users. There are some factors here to determine such as whether the competitions have time limits, or what the frequency of events are, but the central motivating theme would be competition and the catharsis of completing challenges.

Getting friends to agree

This app aims to solve the problem of scheduling and organizing events. This idea centers around the idea of having voting and scheduled systems that are more automated and refined compared to current methods. Ideas include a time limit on voting so that events must be decided on within a certain period, recommendation algorithms, and a real time voting system. The main benefit behind idea is that event selection would be moderated by a third party; the app itself. Instead of friends trying to plan amongst themselves, the app would control voting and scheduling to make sure an event actually gets planned. Events would be chosen through algorithms based off of interests of the group of people and through algorithms to amalgamate scheduling, voting, and event information.

Automated flash mob app

The last idea is to try to plan "flash mobs" or large groups of people to perform certain activities. This would require coordinating large groups of people and convincing them to do events through embracing a crowd mentality. This also offers people the chance to meet people and for us to cater the demographics. This could include, for instance, people from the same university, people from different universities, etc.

The application ideas were evaluated based off of interest, feasibility, and significance. This information is shown in the table below.

Idea	Interest	Feasibility	Significance	Ranking
Challenges	7	8	5	2
Getting friends to agree	7	5	8	1
Automated flash mob app	5	8	5	3

We decided to go with the idea of an automated voting and recommendation system for friends (Getting Friends to Agree). We found that many users described coordinating and planning with friends as the most challenging task. Furthermore, many of the users really valued going on events with their friends. This way we can help friends plan their events with their friends as well as provide them with new events. It would also be easy to extend this to users who wish to discover by themselves.

By facilitating the user planning and creation of these events, it will allow users to discover and plan more events. We feel that this app offers the most promise in terms of creating curated event lists, making planning and organizing events easier, and ultimately allowing users to focus on the experience of the event itself and ignore the hassles associated with planning.

After deciding on this app idea, we sketched some design ideas. These are shown below.

Sketches

The first sketch below focuses on the social aspect. The main screen allows you to select your friends and then presents you with a list of options. Your friends can invite you to events (which appear as notifications). The focus here is on social. Coordinating and planning with your friends, and selecting who you want to include. This sketch is shown below in Figure 8.
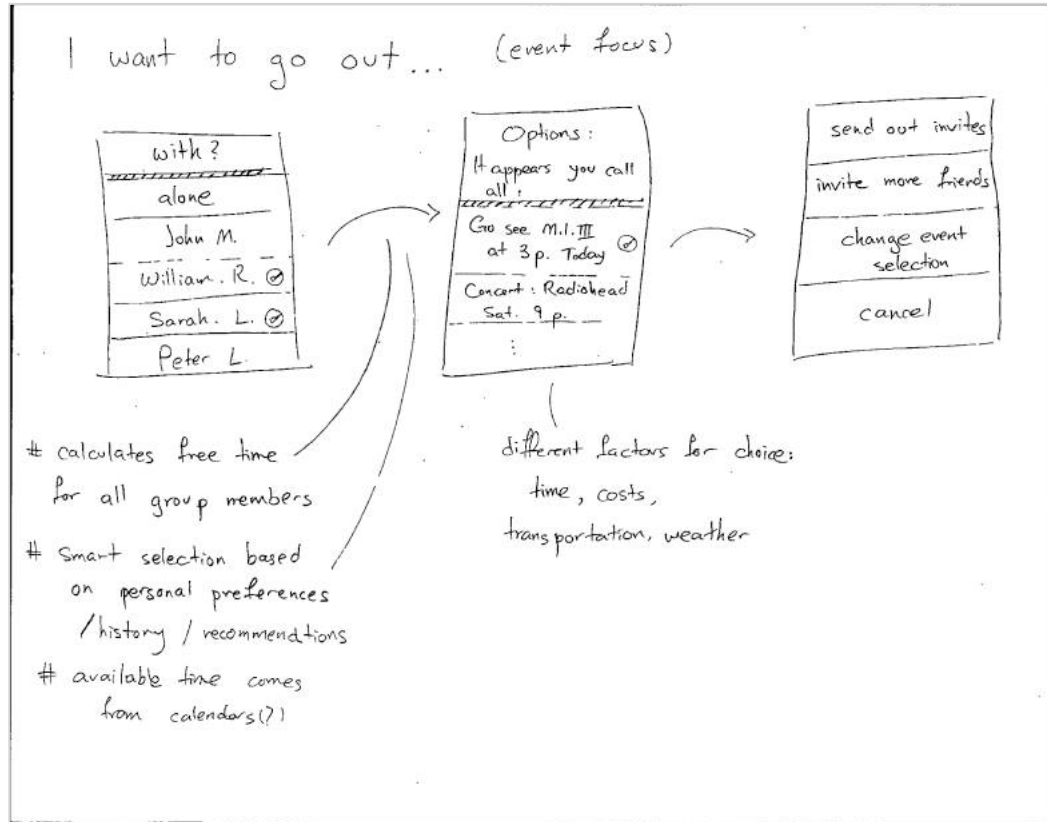

Figure 8: Social-first Event Planning

The second idea focuses more on the individual. Every individual has a profile where you select and curate your own list with your preferences. Suggestions appear that you can 'transmit' to your friends. This idea is focused on your preferences, and making sure that the list is as curated to you as possible. This idea is shown below in Figure 9.
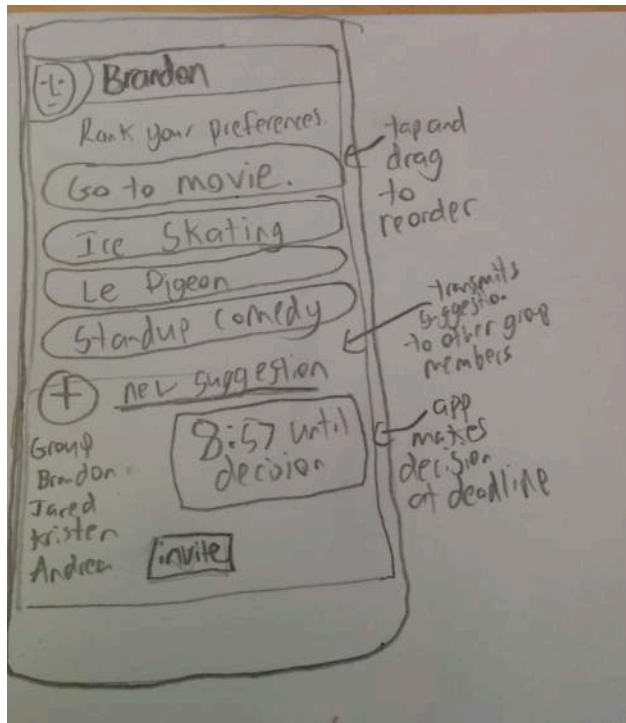
Figure 9: Curated Individual Event Profiles

The last idea has been dubbed "Tinder for Events". The design idea is focused on the experience of the event itself. The main screen is a full screen immersive look at the event suggestion. From that you can choose to book it or see another event. Booking it allows you to add friends or go with solo. The theme here is that the event exploration and discovery comes first, as people will use that to determine what they want to do.
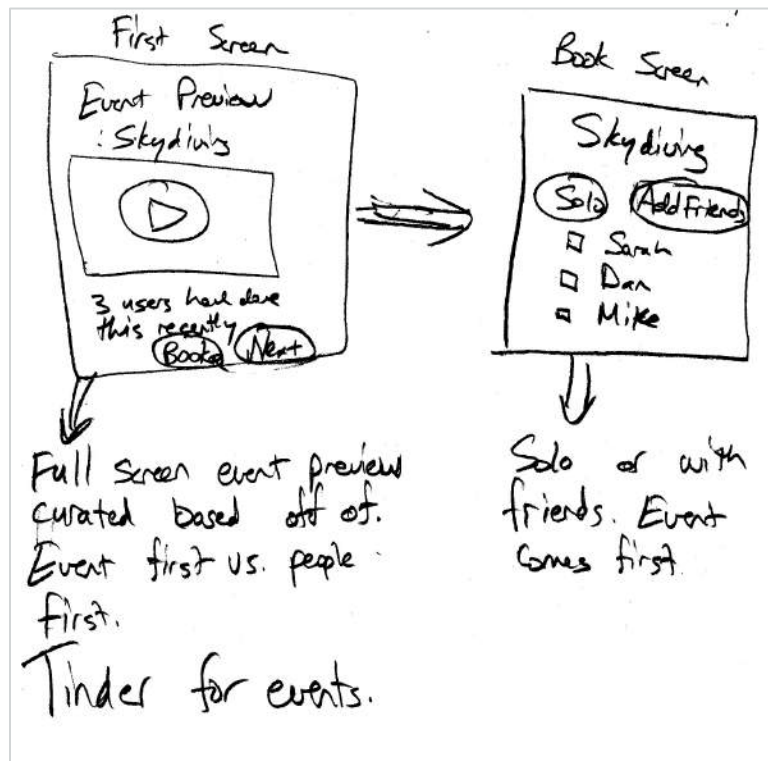

Figure 10: Immersive Event Discovery

The last idea is called the "FOMO" app, or "Fear Of Missing Out". The idea behind this is that we can convince users to take part in events if they are afraid of missing out. The main planning cycle allows you to get a group together and invite friends. Friends will receive invites. If you then decide to not go on this event, you can't later change your mind. This sketch is shown below in Figure 11.
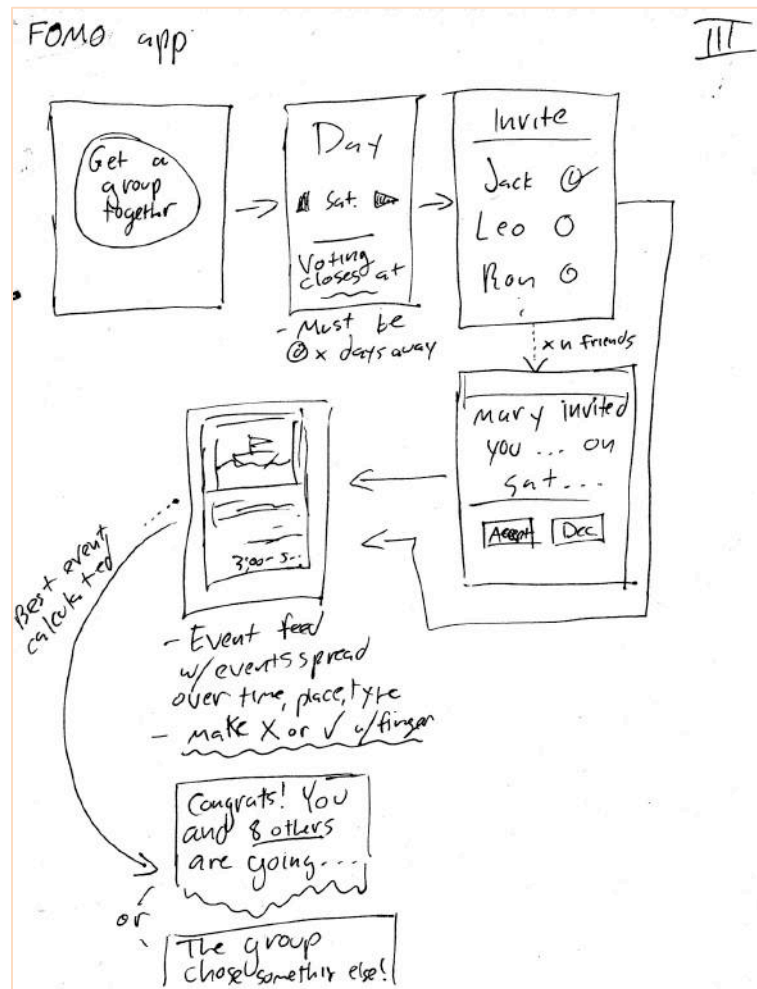

Figure 11: Fear of Missing Out Application